

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CEA-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

FRB-03 H-01 INR-07 INT-05 L-03 LAB-04 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 AID-05 CIEP-01 SS-15 STR-04 ITC-01 TRSE-00

USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 OMB-01 FEA-01 /098 W

-----140750Z 030953 /17

P 121015Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5773

INFO USDA WASHDC PRIORITY

USDOC WASHDC PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY RABAT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY

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RABAT AND ALGIERS FOR AGATT KUHL

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAGR, BEXP, TS

SUBJECT: EXPORT OF SEED POTATOES TO TUNISIA

REFS: (A) STATE 5957 (NOTAL), (B) TUNIS 0236 (NOTAL),

(C) TUNIS 0760 (NOTAL)

1. EZZEDDINE CHELBI, CHEF DU CABINET TO MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, TOLD ECONOMIC COUNSELOR FEBRUARY 11 THE GOT'S DECISION NOT TO IMPORT KENNEBEC SEED POTATOES BASED ON UNWILLINGNESS TO RUN RISKSH OF THEIR USE HERE WITHOUT RESULTS OF TIME-CONSUMING IN-GROUND TESTS. CHELBI SAID HE UNDERSTOOD EMBASSY'S CONCERN AND WELCOMED OPPORTUNITY TO DETAIL EXPLANATION OF DECISION, REVIEWED AT HIGHEST LEVEL OF GOT.

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2. CHELBI SAID GOT DID NOT QUESTION VALUE OF USDA CERTIFICATE NOR ALLEGE THAT SHIPMENT WAS CONTAMINATED WITH ANY SPECIFIC VIRUS. HOWEVER HE SAID, FRENCH AND OTHER PROHIBITIONS OF ON IMPORTING OF KENNEBEC POTATOES FOR SEED HAD STRENGTHENED CASE OF TECHNI- CIANS WHO ADVOCATED CAUTION EVEN IN FACE OF SHORTFALL IN SUPPLY (TUNISIA HAS IMPORTED ONLY ABOUT 6,000 TONS FOR THIS SEASON INSTEAD OF USUAL 10,000 TONS--AND AT HIGH EUROPEAN PRICES)

AND WHO MAINTAINED NO QUICK LABORATORY TEST WOULD SUFFICE TO PROVE SAFETY OF UNKNOWN VARIETY.

3. INTERNALLY CONSISTENT ACCOUNT GIVEN BY CHELBI. CHELBI DETAILED HOW DIRECTION OF PRODUCTION OF HIS MINISTRY AND AUTHORIZED IMPORTATION OF UNTESTED KENNEBEC SEED ON ADVICE OF FARMERS UNION GROUP, BUT WITHOUT REQUIRED EXPLICIT ADVICE OF THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE.

4. CHELBI SAID HE PERSONALLY HAD REVIEWED MATTER AND REFERRED IT TO THE PRIME MINISTER, WHO SUGGESTED THAT THE OFFICIAL WHO ISSUED THE IMPORT CERTIFICATE BE CENSURED AND THE IMPORTER BE FULLY INDEMNIFIED.

5. CHELBI SAID THAT IN-GROUND TESTS OF SAMPLES OF SEED (REST TO BE DESTROYED) MIGHT INDICATE WITHIN AS BRIEF A PERIOD AS ONE YEAR WHETHER THE SEED IS SAFE AND SUITABLE FOR USE IN TUNISIA, LEADING TO ITS LISTING BY THE AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE AS AN ELIGIBLE IMPORT.

6. IN SUMMARY, CHELBI VIEWED THIS MATTER AS A LAMENTABLE INCIDENT, COSTLY BOTH TO THE GOT BUDGET AND TO PROSPECTS FOR PRODUCTION.

7. WHILE CHELBI'S EXPLANATION IS NOT ENTIRELY IN TUNE WITH OTHER VERSIONS CURRENT IN TUNIS--NOT EVEN WITH HIS OWN CASUAL REMARKS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY (TUNIS 0760), WE BELIEVE THAT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES

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VISIT OF USDA EXPERT IS LESS URGENT SINCE CREDIBILITY OF USDA DOCUMENTATION IS NOT DIRECTLY CHALLENGED AND SINCE THERE APPEAR TO BE NO PROSPECTS FOR IMMEDIATE CHANGE IN GOT POLICY. (CLEARLY, THE SHIPMENT IN

PORT IS LOST.) NEVERTHELESS, WE SUGGEST PROMPT FOLLOW-UP BY USDA ON ALLEGED FRENCH AND BELGIAN PROHIBITIONS ON IMPORTS OF KENNEBEC POTATOES

FOR SEED PURPOSES AND FURTHER COMMUNICATION TO GOT THROUGH APPROPRIATE

CHANNELS. VISIT HERE STARTING FEBRUARY 21 OF REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL ATTACHE KUHLMANN FROM RABAT COULD PROVIDE OCCASION FOR "EDUCATIONAL" EXCHANGE. (CHELBI HAS PROMISED TO PROVIDE US WITH COPY OF RELEVANT FRENCH DECREE OF LATE 1976 AS WELL AS COPY OF USDA CERTIFICATE AND TO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE LIST OF ELIGIBLE SEED IMPORTS; WILL FORWARD IF AND WHEN RECEIVED.)
MULCAHY

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Sent Date: 12-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
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